اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah 89 - Al-Fajr (The Dawn)

سُوْرَةُ الْفَجْرِ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)

وَ الْفَجْرِ ۙ﴿۱﴾

(89:1) By the dawn,

وَ لَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ ۙ﴿۲﴾

(89:2) and the ten nights,

وَّ الشَّفْعِ وَ الْوَتْرِ ۙ﴿۳﴾

(89:3) and the even and the odd,

وَ الَّيْلِ اِذَا يَسْرِ ۚ﴿۴﴾

(89:4) and by the night when it departs.

هَلْ فِيْ ذٰلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِيْ حِجْرٍ ۝٥

(89:5) Is there in this an oath for one endowed with understanding? (1)

(1) Much difference of opinion has been expressed by the commentators in the commentary of these verses, so much so that in respect of “the even and the odd” there are as many as 36 different views. In some traditions the commentary of these verses has also been attributed to the Prophet (peace be upon him), but the fact is that no commentary is confirmed from him, otherwise it was not possible that anyone from among the companions, their immediate successors, and later commentators would have dared to determine the meaning of these verses by themselves after the commentary by the Prophet (peace be upon him).

After a study of the style one clearly feels that there was an argument already in progress in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) was presenting something and the disbelievers were denying it. At this, affirming what the Prophet (peace be upon him) presented, it was said: By such and such a thing, so as to say: By these things, what Muhammad (peace be upon him) says is wholly based on the truth. Then, the argument is concluded with the question: Is there an oath in it for a man of understanding. That is, is there a need for yet another oath to testify to the truth of this matter. Is this oath not enough to persuade a sensible man to accept that which Muhammad (peace be upon him) is presenting.

Now the question arises: what was the argument for the sake of which an oath was sworn by these four things? For this we shall have to consider the whole theme which, in the following verses, commences with: Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Aad, and continues till the end of the Surah. It shows that the argument concerned the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter, which the people of Makkah were refusing to acknowledge and the Messenger (peace be upon him) was trying to convince them of this by constant preaching and instruction. At

this oaths were sworn by the dawn, the ten nights, the even and the odd, and the departing night to assert: Are these four things not enough to convince a sensible man of the truth of this matter so that he may need yet another evidence for it?

After having determined the significance of these oaths in the context, we would inevitably have to take each of these in the meaning relevant to the subsequent theme. First of all, it is said: By Fajr. Fajr is the breaking of day, i.e. the time when the first rays of the light of day appear in the midst of the darkness of night as a white streak from the east. Then, it is said: By the ten nights. If the context is kept in view, it will become plain that it implies each group of the ten nights among the thirty nights of the month, the first ten nights being those during which the crescent moon starting as a thin nail, goes on waxing every night until its major portion becomes bright. The second group of the ten nights being those during which the greater part of the night remains illumined by the moon. And the last ten nights being those during which the moon goes on waning and the nights becoming more and more dark until by the end of the month the whole night becomes absolutely dark. Then, it is said: By the even and the odd. Even is the number which is divisible into two equal parts, as 2, 4, 6, 8, and the odd the number which is not so divisible, as l, 3, 5, 7. Generally, it may imply everything in the universe, for things in the universe either exist in pairs or as singles. But since the context here concerns the day and the night, the even and the odd mean the alternation of day and night in the sense that the dates of the month go on changing from the first to the second, and from second to the third, and every change brings with it a new state. Last of all, it is said: By the night when it is departing, i.e. when the darkness which had covered the world since sunset may be at the verge of disappearing and the day be dawning. Now let us consider as a whole the four things an oath by which has been sworn to assert that the news which Muhammad (peace be upon him) is giving of the meting out of rewards and punishments is wholly based on the truth. All these things point to the reality that an all-Powerful Sustainer is ruling over this universe and nothing of what He is doing is absurd, purposeless, or lacking wisdom. On the contrary,

a wise plan clearly underlies whatever He does. In His world one will never see that while it is night, the midday sun should suddenly appear overhead, or that the moon should appear one evening in the shape of the crescent and be followed next evening by the full moon, or that the night, when it falls, should never come to an end, but should become perpetual, or that there should be no system in the alternation of the day and night so that one could keep a record of the dates and know what month was passing, what was the date, on what date a particular work is to begin, and when it is to finish, what are the dates of the summer season and what of the rainy or winter season. Apart from countless other things of the universe if man only considers this regularity of the day and night intelligently and seriously, he will find evidence of the truth that this relentless discipline and order has been established by an Omnipotent Sovereign God; with it are connected countless of the advantages of the creatures whom He has created on the earth. Now, if a person living in the world of such a Wise, Omnipotent and All-Mighty Creator denies the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter, he inevitably commits one of the two errors: either he is a denier of His powers and thinks that though He has the power to create the universe with such matchless order and discipline, He is powerless to recreate man and mete out rewards and punishments to him or he denies His wisdom and knowledge and thinks that although He has created man with intellect and powers in the world, yet He will neither ever call him to account as to how he used his intellect and his powers, nor will reward him for his good deeds, nor punish him for his evil deeds. The one who believes in either is foolish in the extreme.

اَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ۝٦

(89:6) Have you (2) not seen how your Lord dealt with Ad

(2) After reasoning out the judgment from the system of day and night, now an argument is being given from man’s own history for its being a certainty. The mention of the conduct of a

few well known tribes of history and their ultimate end is meant to point out that the universe is not working under some deaf and blind law of nature, but a Wise God is ruling over it, and in the Kingdom of that God only one law, which man describes as the law of nature is not working, but a moral law also is operative, which necessarily calls for retribution and rewards and punishments. The results of the working of the law have been appearing over and over again even in this world, which point out to the people of understanding as to what is the nature of the kingdom of the universe. Any nation which carved out a system of life for itself, heedless of the Hereafter and of the rewards and punishments of God, was ultimately corrupted and depraved, and whichever nation followed this way, was eventually visited with the scourge of punishment by the Lord of the universe. This continuous experience of man's own history testifies to two things clearly:

(1) That denial of the Hereafter has been instrumental in corrupting every nation and sending it ultimately to its doom; therefore, the Hereafter indeed is a reality clashing with which leads, as it has always led, to the same inevitable results.

(2) That retribution for deeds will at some time in the future take place in its full and complete form also, for the people who touched the extreme limits of corruption and depravity and were visited with punishment had been preceded by many others who had sown seeds of corruption for centuries and left the world without being visited by any scourge.

The justice of God demands that all those people also should be called to account at some time and they too should suffer for their misdeeds. Argument from history and morals for the Hereafter has been given at many places in the Quran and we have explained it everywhere accordingly. For example, see (E.Ns 5, 6 of Surah Al-Araf); (E.N. 12 of Surah Younus); (E.Ns 57, 105, 115 of Surah Hud); (E.N. 9 of Surah Ibrahim); (E.Ns 66, 86 of Surah An-Naml); (E.N. 8 of Surah Ar-Room); (E.N. 25 of Surah Saba); (E.Ns 29, 30 of Surah Sad); (E.N. 80 of Surah Al-Momin); (E.Ns 33, 34 of Surah Ad-Dukhan); (E.Ns 27, 28 of Surah Al-Jathiyah); (E.N. 17 of Surah Qaf); (E.N. 21 of Surah Adh-Dharuyat).

اِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ ﴿٧﴾

(89:7) of Iram, [3] known for their lofty columns,

(3) Aad Iram implies the ancient tribe of Aad, who have been called Aad-ula in the Quran and Arabian history. In Surah An-Najm, it has been said: And that We destroyed the ancient people of Aad (Verse 50), i.e. the Aad to whom the Prophet Hud (peace be upon him) had been sent, and who were punished with a scourge. As against them the people of Aad who remained safe and flourished afterwards are remembered as Aad-ukhra in Arabian history. The ancient Aad are called Aad-Iram for the reason that they belonged to that branch of the Semetic race which descended from Iram, son of Shem, son of Noah (peace be upon him). Several other sub-branches of this main branch are well known in history. One of which were the Thamud, who have been mentioned in the Quran; another are the Aramaeans, who in the beginning inhabited the northern parts of Syria and whose language Aramaic occupies an important place among the Semetic languages.

The words dhat-ul-imad ذَاتِ لعِمَادِ (of lofty pillars) have been used for the Aad because they built high buildings and the pattern of architecture of erecting edifices on lofty pillars was introduced by them in the world. At another place in the Quran this characteristic has been mentioned in connection with the Prophet Hud (peace be upon him), who said to them: What, you erect for mere pleasure a monument on every high spot, and build huge castles as if you were immortal. (Surah Ash-Shuara, Ayats 128-129).

الَّتِى لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِى الْبِلٰدِ ﴿٨﴾

(89:8) the like of whom no nation was ever created in the lands of the world? [4]

(4) That is, they were a matchless people of their time; no other nation in the world compares with them in strength, glory and grandeur. At other places in the Quran, it has been said about them: Your Lord made you very robust. (Surah Al-Araf, Ayat 69). As for the Aad, they became arrogant with pride in the land, without any right, and said: Who is stronger than us in might. (Surah Ha Meem As-Sajdah, Ayat 15). When you seized somebody, you seized him like a tyrant. (Surah Ash-Shuara, Ayat 130).

وَ ثَمُودَ الَّذِ ۪ينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ ۪ي ۝٩

(89:9) And how did He deal with Thamud who hewed out rocks in the valley? (5)

(5) The valley: Wad-il-Qura, where the Thamud carved out dwellings in the mountains, and probably in history they were the first people who started cutting out such buildings into the rocks. (For details, see (E.Ns 57, 59 of Surah Al- Araf); (E.N. 45 of Surah Al-Hijr); (E.Ns 95, 99 of Surah Ash- Shuara).

وَ فِرْعَوْنَ ذِى الْاَوْتَادِ ۙ﴿۱۰﴾

(89:10) And with Pharaoh of the tent pegs [6]

(6) The words dhul-autad ﴿ الْاَوْتَادِ ﴾ (of the stakes) for Pharaoh have also been used in (Surah Sad, Ayat 12). This can have several meanings. Possibly his forces have been compared to the stakes, and “of the stakes” means “of great forces”, for it was by their power and might that he ruled a firmly established kingdom; it might also imply multiplicity of forces, and the meaning may be that wherever his large armies camped, pegs of the tents were seen driven into the ground on every side; it may also imply the stakes at which he punished the people, and it is also possible that the pyramids of Egypt have been compared to the stakes, for they are the remnants of the grandeur and glory of the Pharaohs, and seem to have been driven into the ground like stakes for centuries.

الَّذِيْنَ طَغَوْا فِى الْبِلٰدِ ۙ﴿۱۱﴾

(89:11) who transgressed in the countries of the world

فَاَكْثَرُوْا فِيْهَا الْفَسَادَ ۙ﴿۱۲﴾

(89:12) spreading in them much corruption?

فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ ۭ﴿۱۳﴾

(89:13) Then their Lord unloosed upon them the lash of chastisement.

اِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصَادِ ؕ﴿۱۴﴾

(89:14) Truly your Lord is ever watchful. [7]

(7) The words “ever watchful in ambush” have been used metaphorically for keeping watch on the movements and activities of the wicked and mischievous people. An ambush is a place where a person lies hiding in wait to attack somebody by surprise. The victim, thoughtless of his fate, comes and falls a prey. The same is the case against Allah of those wicked people who spread mischief in the world and have no sense and fear that there is God above them, Who is watching all their misdeeds. Therefore, they go on committing everyday more and more evils fearlessly until they reach the limit which Allah does not permit them to transgress. At that very moment His scourge descends upon them suddenly.

فَاَمَّا الۡاِنۡسَانُ اِذَا مَا ابۡتَلٰىهُ رَبُّهٗ فَاَكۡرَمَهٗ وَ نَعَّمَهٗ ۙ فَيَقُوۡلُ رَبِّىۡۤ اَكۡرَمَنِ ؕ ﴿۱۵﴾

(89:15) As for man, (8) when his Lord tests him by exalting him and bestowing His bounties upon him, he says: “My Lord has exalted me.”

(8) Now, criticizing the general moral state of the people, it is being said: After all, why shouldn’t the men who have adopted such an attitude in the life of the world, be ever called to account, and how can it be regarded as a demand of reason and justice that when man has left the world, after doing all he could, he should never receive any reward or suffer any punishment for his deeds.

وَ اَمَّاۤ اِذَا مَا ابۡتَلٰىهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيۡهِ رِزۡقَهٗ ۙ فَيَقُوۡلُ رَبِّىۡۤ اَهَانَنِ ؕ ﴿۱۶﴾

(89:16) But when He tests him by straitening his sustenance, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me.” (9)

(9) This then is man’s materialistic view of life. He regards the wealth and position and power of this world alone as everything. When he has it, he is filled with pride and says God has honored

me; and when he fails to obtain it, he says: God has humiliated me. Thus, the criterion of honor and humiliation in his sight is the possession of wealth and position and power, or the absence of it, whereas the truth which he does not understand is that whatever Allah has given anybody in the world has been given for the sake of a trial. If he has given him wealth and power, it has been given for a trial to see whether he becomes grateful for it, or commits ingratitude. If he has made him poor, in this too there is a trial for him to see whether he remains content and patient in the will of God and faces his hardships bravely within permissible bounds, or becomes ready to transgress every limit of morality and honesty and starts cursing his God.

كَلَّا بَل لَّا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ ﴿١٧﴾

(89:17) But no; [10] you do not treat the orphan honorably, [11]

(10) That is, this is not all the criterion of honor and disgrace, for the real criterion is the moral good and evil.

(11) That is, as long as his father is alive, your treatment of him is attentive and when his rather dies, even the paternal and maternal uncles and the elder brothers, to say nothing of the neighbors and distant relatives, neglect him.

وَ لَا تَحٰٓضُّونَ عَلٰى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ ﴿١٨﴾

(89:18) and do not urge one another to feed the poor, [12]

(12) That is, nobody in your society feels any urge to feed the poor. Neither a man himself feels inclined to feed a hungry

person, nor is there among the people any urge to do something to satisfy the hunger of the hungry, nor do they exhort one another to do so.

وَ تَاۡكُلُوۡنَ التُّرَاثَ اَكۡلًا لَّمًّا ﴿۱۹﴾

(89:19) and greedily devour the entire inheritance, (13)

(13) In Arabia, the women and children were as a rule deprived of inheritance and the people’s idea in this regard was that the right to inheritance belonged only to those male members who were fit to fight and safeguard the family. Besides, the one who was more powerful and influential among the heirs of the deceased, would annex the whole inheritance without qualms, and usurp the shares of all those who did not have the power to secure their shares. They did not give any importance to the right and duty so that they should honestly render the right to whom it was due as a duty whether he had the power to secure it or not.

وَّ تُحِبُّوۡنَ الۡمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا ؕ ﴿۲۰﴾

(89:20) and love the riches, loving them ardently. (14)

(14) That is, you have no regard for the permissible or the forbidden, the lawful or the unlawful. You feel no qualms about acquiring wealth in any way or by any means, fair or foul, and your greed is never satisfied however much you may have acquired and amassed.

كَلَّاۤ اِذَا دُكَّتِ الۡاَرۡضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا ﴿۲۱﴾

(89:21) But no; [15] when the earth is ground to powder,

(15) That is, you are wrong in thinking that you may do whatever you like in your life of the world, but you will never be called to account for it. The meting out of rewards and punishment denying which you have adopted this mode of life, is not anything impossible and fictitious, but it has to come to pass and it will certainly come to pass at the time being mentioned below.

وَّ جَآءَ رَبُّکَ وَ الْمَلَکُ صَفًّا صَفًّا ﴿۲۲﴾

(89:22) and when your Lord appears [16] with rows upon rows of angels,

(16) Although literally the words jaa Rabbuka mean your Lord will come, obviously there cannot be any question of Allah Almighty's moving from one place to another; therefore, this will inevitably have to be understood as an allegoric expression, which is meant to give an idea that at that time the manifestations of Allah Almighty’s power and His majesty and sovereignty will appear fully, as, for example, in the world the arrival of a king in person in the court is more awe-inspiring than the mere array of his forces and chiefs and nobles.

وَجِایْٓءَ یَوْمَئِذٍۭ بِجَهَنَّمَ ۙ یَوْمَئِذٍ یَّتَذَکَّرُ الْاِنْسٰنُ وَ اَنّٰی ۙ لَهُ الذِّکْرٰی ؕ ﴿۲۳﴾

(89:23) and when Hell is brought near that Day. On that Day will man understand, but of what avail will that understanding be? [17]

(17) The words in the original can have two meanings:

(1) That on that Day man will remember whatever he had done in the world and will regret, but what will remembrance and regretting avail him then.

(2) That on that Day man will take heed and accept admonition: he will realize that whatever he had been told by the Prophets was true and he committed a folly when he did not listen to them; but what will taking heed and accepting the admonition and realizing one's errors avail then.

يَقُوْلُ يٰلَيْتَنِيْ قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِيْ ﴿٢٤﴾

(89:24) He will say: "Would that I had sent ahead what would be of avail for this life of mine!"

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَّا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهٗٓ اَحَدٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

(89:25) Then on that Day Allah will chastise as none other can chastise;

وَّ لَا يُوْثِقُ وَثَاقَهٗٓ اَحَدٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

(89:26) and Allah will bind as none other can bind.

يٰٓاَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾

(89:27) (On the other hand it will be said): "O serene soul! (18)

(18) Peaceful and fully satisfied soul: The man who believed in Allah, the One, as his Lord and Sustainer, and adopted the way of life brought by the Prophets as his way of life, with full satisfaction of the heart, and without the least doubt about it, who acknowledged as absolute truth whatever creed and command he received from Allah and His Messenger, who withheld himself from whatever he was forbidden by Allah's religion, not unwillingly but with perfect conviction that it was really an evil

thing, who offered without sacrifice whatever sacrifice was required to be offered for the sake of the truth, who endured with full peace of mind whatever difficulties, troubles and hardships he met on this way and who felt no remorse on being deprived of the gains and benefits and pleasures in the world which seemed to accrue to those who followed other ways but remained fully satisfied that adherence to true faith had safeguarded him against those errors. This very state has been described at another place in the Quran as sharh sadr. (Surah Al-Anam, Ayat 125).

ارْجِعِیۡۤ اِلٰی رَبِّکِ رَاضِیَۃً مَّرْضِیَّۃً ﴿۲۸﴾

(89:28) Return to your Lord (19) well-pleased (with your blissful destination), well-pleasing (to your Lord).

(19) This he will be told at the time of his death as well as on the Day of Resurrection when he will rise from the dead and move towards the Plain of Assembly and also on the occasion when he will be presented in the divine court. At every stage he will be assured that he is moving towards the Mercy of Allah Almighty.

فَادْخُلِیۡ فِیۡ عِبٰدِیۡ ﴿۲۹﴾

(89:29) So enter among My (righteous) servants

وَ ادْخُلِیۡ جَنَّتِیۡ ﴿۳۰﴾

(89:30) and enter My Paradise.”